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Two years of Supermac

HAROLD MACMILLAN:
Pounding the Way 1959-1961
504pp. Macmillan. £4.50.

After the crescendo of wind and tide, blust and storm, Harold Macmillan's ship of state floats into calmer waters. The title of his fifth volume of memoirs is taken from the dedication inscribed by President Kennedy on a photograph taken in 1961: "To Prime Minister Harold Macmillan who has 'pounded the way' on this and many previous occasions." The photograph shows the Prime Minister doing just that, watched admiringly by the President and their two Secretaries of State for Foreign Affairs. Like every previous volume, then, this one also has a central theme, outlined with a characteristic combination of ironic modesty and tentative precision. Mr Macmillan sees himself as the navigating officer of a great Anglo-American battleship, handing over in mid-Atlantic to a brilliant new captain. But alas, *disaster* *visum*, as Mr Macmillan is bound to say sooner or later. The title of his next volume should perhaps be drawn from Walt Whitman's tragic poem on the death of Abraham Lincoln: "O Captain! my Captain!"

There is a characteristic ambiguity about the direction in which the pilot is pointing. In matters of domestic policy, Mr Macmillan used to be accused of pointing to the right while shuffling to the left. But domestic policy does not bulk large in the present volume. Apart from the perennial problems of inflation, wage claims and the balance of payments (themselves insignificant in scale compared with more recent years), the domestic scene was comparatively untroubled in the years 1960-1961. Like Winston Churchill in his last years of office, Mr Macmillan was chiefly concerned to secure his place in history with some unforgettable achievement on the international stage. Again like Churchill he harked after a settlement of the unhappy relationship known as the Cold War, or at least an agreement which would ensure that it should not turn into a Hot War. Hence the protracted negotiations over Berlin and nuclear weapons which took up so large a proportion of his years of office. But success was denied to him during the two years covered in this volume. Indeed, the collapse of the summit conference in Paris in

1960 and the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961 almost caused Mr Macmillan to despair of success. A more limited outcome—the partial test-ban treaty of 1963—had to await the aftermath of a more dramatic crisis—the confrontation over Cuba in 1962—before he could retire moderately satisfied with his achievement. In the meantime there were three overlapping areas of activity in which he saw a conspicuous role for a British prime minister to play: Europe, Anglo-American relations, and the Commonwealth (particularly Africa). Like every British leader since the Second World War, Mr Macmillan saw himself as a kind of ringmaster trying to control a threatening circus. His one great advantage was his personal acquaintance with most of the principal performers in each of the three rings: Eisenhower in the United States, de Gaulle in Europe, Menzies and other prime ministers in the Commonwealth. There were of course many other leading figures whom he had to learn to manage, but he was seldom able to achieve the same rapport with them as with his wartime colleagues. Adversely he found deceitful and shift; Verwoerd an incomprehensible bigot, though personally agreeable; Dulles stiff and unyielding. Of the new figures, unquestionably his favourite was John F. Kennedy; but he also found unexpectedly attractive qualities in others far removed from his previous experience as Khrushchev and Nkrumah. There are signs of a mellowed personality on his own part in this presumably penultimate volume, which may help to account for an impression of a growing ease of intercourse. Mr Macmillan has many kind words for Gaitskill, for example; and there is a good deal of honest self-criticism. The Archbishop of Canterbury, however, remains *à tête nue* whom he loves to tease.

Such relationships are crucially important, because Mr Macmillan still sees diplomacy as a matter of personal manoeuvre and accommodation rather than a balancing of material forces and interests. To him, as to de Gaulle, the power to influence international events is not so much a function of the number of divisions a country can put into the field, or its output of steel and electricity, as of the intellectual and moral capacity of its leaders. In realistic terms, both he and de Gaulle were skilfully practising a confidence-trick in seeking to maintain the standing of their respective countries as great powers. In both cases the confidence-trick was brilliant.

One can never be quite sure, however, with such a histrionic genius as Mr Macmillan. In his time he played many parts, some of them simultaneously. He loved to tease his contemporaries, and now he teases his readers. He was an old-fashioned country gentleman who ran his government like a house-party, and yet dealt more effectively with the tough forces of the modern world than any of his predecessors or successors. He

was a patrician snob who showed contempt for titles by showing them to his friends and refusing to use them himself. He was a believer in nepotism who was accused of favouritism but deliberately excluded his own relatives from office. He was a high-minded intellectual who enjoyed poking fun at his own kind. He is a master of exact language who delights in veiling his meaning behind casual phrases of reserve and ambiguity. (What does he mean, for example, by saying that "a bluff only a bluff until someone calls it?") In the present volume he appears to go further than before in revealing the hitherto unknown background events, but many of them remain tantalizingly obscure as before. There is a long account, for example, of an episode in the Congo, when the British Government first agreed and then refused to supply 1,000lb of bombs for the United Nations to use against Katanga. But there is no mention of the crucial facts that the bombs were to be used from Canberra aircraft of the Indian Air Force; that the Indians already had a substantial stock of the bombs in question; and that they were about to attack Goa.

Mr Macmillan's memoirs will, of course, provide raw material of the most vital importance for future historians. But it will have to be carefully scrutinized in conjunction with other sources. Where it will be of incomparable value will be in assessing the fascinating character of the protagonist himself. Although more prolific than Churchill or Eden, let alone Attlee, Mr Macmillan is both more entertaining and more sensitive than any of them. His wit and irony are all his own; his comment on Khrushchev's press conference after the U-2 incident—"Quite a little if he would only permit!"—could have come from no other leader. Nor could any other prime minister have poked such elegant fun at his own tastes for the grouse-moor and the golf-course. But however much he may pretend to have been the amateur captain of a country-house cricket team, he is equally revealing of the steely professionalism behind the facade. In what is perhaps the single most important sentence in the book, he writes that "a careful reader will feel that the power of a Prime Minister has steadily grown." It is interesting to see whether readers feel the same. In any case, they will have to do it; and fortunately they will also greatly enjoy it.

Traditions are so deeply ingrained that in 1972 the tripartite leadership (Shadow Cabinet, TUC, and national executive committee) is at its end to fashion a coherent doctrine or foreign policy; and much more. Let us pray these are not the marks of a natural governing party. While we see the resumption of the working-class become teachers, and then get adopted as Labour candidates. The other day *Labour Weekly*, an official organ of Transport House, reported the adoption of new candidates. Seven of them were teachers. Well-to-do Labour MPs now almost form a majority of the union-sponsored MPs. Nor does it mean a truly "intellectual" trend, means a party where theory and ideology count for more than practical knowledge.

While the gap between the working class and the Parliamentary Labour Party opens up, the gap between the bourgeoisie and the increasingly democratic workers and the increasingly democratic Conservative Party closes. In a sense the future can be held to be in the practical rather than the theoretical. It may lie with the Marxist, the socialist, or the syndicalist, or the movement rather than with the Labour Party and the internal con-

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Escape into irony

MELBA TAYLOR:
Devastating Boys and other
Chatter and Windus. £2.25.

Melba Taylor must surely now be one of the four or five most distinguished living practitioners of the art of the short story in the English-speaking world. Some have reservations as to her range as a novelist; there is a suspicion of English middle-class preoccupations, and woe of a kind which is too much of a kind to be a kind. In the present volume she appears to go further than before in revealing the hitherto unknown background events, but many of them remain tantalizingly obscure as before. There is a long account, for example, of an episode in the Congo, when the British Government first agreed and then refused to supply 1,000lb of bombs for the United Nations to use against Katanga. But there is no mention of the crucial facts that the bombs were to be used from Canberra aircraft of the Indian Air Force; that the Indians already had a substantial stock of the bombs in question; and that they were about to attack Goa.

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memory, not into sympathetic nostalgia but into the irony of those strenuous escapes into pleasure we embody in the word "holiday". The dingy, mosquito-plagued hotel, for instance, at which one arrived too late to see the cathedral, dined disgustingly, and lay awake to the reverberation of snoring through cardboard walls; here, on honeymoon, Melanie begins to smell the murky adjustments of marriage as the next-door couple's quarrel mounts and yet, next morning, appears grotesquely and recognizably glossed over by the pursuit of pleasure. Here, in a snatched escape from the giggles and prurient condescension of youth, a lonely dull widower is cruelly thwarted (by gout) from his idyllic chance with lovely fat gallant Phyl, the publican's wife getting over her hysterectomy with blistering sunburn; this tender and tragicomic non-affair is a perfect example of the way Mrs Taylor, in a few deft words, transforms the banal stereotype into an endearingly vulnerable individual.

Even where we are at one remove from the situation—a schoolgirl infatuation for the dashing Miss Brodie-ish teacher seen, many years later, as a glimpse into an ill-fated lesbian love affair—the visual details are so apt that a sharp image remains. These women—and Mrs Taylor is much less successful inside the skin of the lonely West Indian boy in his bed-sitter—are schooled by their

conditions for their own survival, conjuring the very air by which they breathe and live.

Mr Hanley's own created world has always been rigidly enclosed and self-supporting. Remaining so, it follows that in the aptly titled *Another World* there are echoes from the past. In the determined pursuit by Mervyn Thomas (chapel minister in the small Welsh coastal town in which this comedy of won-cuses is enacted) of a reclusive, Miss Vaughan, in the way he follows her or stands, single-minded, in dark shape outside the hotel where she lies in her room talking to an imaginary friend, there is a trace of the disgraced Captain Marlow of *The Closed Harbour*. In his sister, Margaid, something of Marlow's pursuing Fury of a mother; although Margaid leans her nagging weight on her brother to save him from disgrace, not to make him pay for it. In the splendid and ebullient Mrs Gaudell, gin-swilling owner of the "Decent" Hotel where Miss Vaughan lodges, and in Mrs Gaudell's handyman assistant, Jones (biddable to do his duty in both dining-room and bedroom), there are reminders of Mr and Mrs Bunnes in *Say Nothing*, who similarly worked their separate stolid logics to opposed but neatly dovetailed ends.

But the main echo in *Another World* is the one that comes ringing challengingly down the years from the entire canon: that of the conflict Mrs Hanley has himself portrayed

because it is central to his vision—the conflict of personal desires which lead to what look like little hairs, but are not, because they are what these people need and will go to any lengths to keep well-stoked. Wherever they may be, in foci's, tight houses in tight streets, Hanley people have always from the outsider's view of things moaned and suffered, mocked each other's misfortunes, committed crimes, squabbled, been utterly obsessed by trivia; but below the surface there can be detected the light of human satisfaction, and the deeper you go into a Hanley novel the more radiant it becomes.

Restricted, mean, deprived, as his world may often have looked to readers on the alert for what the author of the long critical tribute in the *TLS* (June 11, 1971) called "the grander harmonies" of life and letters, he has always, one realizes, written about human happiness, however odd or eccentric its source. It looks as if he will continue to do so. What his ten-year stint in the theatre has done, though, is sharpen the tools of wit and irony. The theatre is a place where merely to look unbent an actor must paint like a Red Indian. His more than welcome return to novel-writing reveals him as not only still the fine novelist he was but as one with a new and valuable gift for being seen as well as felt to wear the twin masks of tragedy and comedy—while still looking exactly like himself.

The area John Proctor is lost in lies somewhere between the life of a college administrator and the life of a violent action which coincidence obliges him to re-enter, cherishing memories of a brave war record. Proctor's friend, Constant Thwaite, tells the story in a blend of reportage and dramatized omniscience, a convention which seems artificial only when badly done. Thwaite's manner is academic, the curious, rapid speech that switches from the laconic and cultured offhand to pompous moralizing and heavy formality. This idiom provides the only humour in the novel, which is otherwise unsmilingly dedicated to unravelling the mystery of how a country road became sown with mines, blowing up a local baker's van and then a ramp, in a fast car. Proctor

backgrounds to pursue the conventional escapes, of culture, travel, food, polite bridge-playing acquaintance and discreet sex; but somehow the secret is lost—to be found, for instance, by a shy, unhappy Surrey heiress with the loutish *filis du patron* of the Dordogne bracken while her bossy guardian is tormented by boredom and social pretensions. Or, in the title story, to be quite unexpectedly, and exhaustingly, found by the careworn wife of a smugly liberal don who is persuaded to give a charity holiday to two small black East End kids; shatter her rural reputation and routine responses they may ("You said off" on the lawn, "Church snelt nasty" and so did the "dirty old cows"), but the house is deadly quiet when Laura has handed them back.

The Devastating Boys has, indeed, so many varying moments where appearances and "standards" are turned topsy-turvy that a less generous writer might have allowed this collection to seem satirical and even malicious. But the gentle reminder, implied even in Mrs Taylor's most sardonic descriptive details, that we are all as ludicrously self-seeking, as blind and petty, as these faded snapshot figures, is enough to shake any such glib critical comment. Perhaps it is the humble wisdom of experience that all story-tellers need to focus the moment against the insignificant wastes of time that lie around.

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Sherry pie

THOMAS HINDE:
Generally A Virgin
191pp. Hodder and Stoughton. £1.90.

This is Thomas Hinde's twelfth novel: a productive record, even for somebody who started as an undergraduate. But his books oddly—even perversely—refuse to add up to an oeuvre. One can't speak of a Hinde world or a Hinde character, while one can for such not necessarily more talented contemporaries as Frederic Raphael or Edna O'Brien. He remains obstinately locked in the ventriloquist's rather than the divine creator's role, inhabiting the sympathy now of a middle-aged loser (Mr Nicholas), now of a gangster's moll (Bird). He withholds not only moral judgment, but the narrator's personal tone under which judgment is so often smuggled. He remains an elusive fish for critical rods, with little sign of unease about the fact.

Yet he is the opposite of an artless writer. *Generally A Virgin* is 185 pages long, and has a bare fistful of characters. But its subject is nothing less than America's Problem. And if that sounds like a sophomore's theme, the novel is not only set on campus, but behaves like a campus modernization of one of the World's Eternal Legends. This time, the myth is that of the maiden—"generally a virgin"—who must be sacrificed to the serpent which plagues her land, and the young man of humble birth who seeks to save her. If the reworking is clumsy, so is America's search for her own myths. (Otherwise who would take Thomas Wolfe seriously?) This is no visiting lecturer's sketch-book, like Malcolm Bradbury's *Stepping Westward* or Mr Hinde's own *High*. It is an attempt to enter the skin of Middle America, to speak its own voice, to write its own book. It deserves a credit for authenticity, if nothing else.

Unfortunately one of Middle America's notorious failings is its inability to speak plainly about itself. Mr Hinde has opted for a style which represents not so much rids on the inarticulate as a series of frenzied incidents on its frontier: a matter of jump-cuts and unfinished sentences, the suggestive of a painful collaboration between Ken Kesey and Ford Madox Ford. Jo, his Middle-Western hero

adrift in an Eastern college, is a confusedly all-American boy, no sooner away from home than recruited as a campus informer by the FBI. A shade predictably, he comes to love the thing he infiltrates, or at least one part of it: an equally confused, all-American radical girl, who leans on Jo for moral support while going around with a drop-out on a drugs charge.

It's a difficult situation for a *straight* straight man, let alone a straight man who is also an FBI snout. But it's just the sort of lead a snout can't refuse, even if his monthly \$250 goes on legal aid for the most dubious citizens. The situation is loaded with ironies, but through the muzzle of an old-fashioned firing-piece, Jo blunders in and out of hopeless, half-cock, deeply American conversations with his roommate, his FBI inductor, Sherry the innocent radical, Sherry's shriek, Sherry's roommate, Sherry's drug-pushing friend, and one or two more. The plot is as cryptic as a thriller, if less thrilling. Hysteria is never far away. After a campus demonstration, Jo is visited by a "fellow-radical" who curses the system as vividly as his inductor curses hippies.

And now he has a vision of this whole great country he belongs to, full of shouting mindless people. Millions and millions of them, too angry to reason, most angry of all at the suggestion that reasoning should be part of any civilisation they wish to be part of. Of course they need guns. . . .

It sounds all right, just as Mr Hinde has most carefully written every paragraph in American English (a genuine feat, today, not a party trick), and just as it ought to be mythically appropriate to end the story with a bomb on a towering office-block, with a simple, boy and simple girl who've gone such different ways—that they can't embrace their own—let alone each other's—simplicity. Self-criticism is as American as Rap Brown. Perhaps because of that, one can't quite take Mr Hinde's version as gospel, or even as Godspell. The smell of an exercise hovers over it, without the excuse of native obsession (as in Philip Roth's *When She Was Good*) like "Bye Bye Miss American Pie" sung by the Seafoam. It's an intriguing idea, lacking nothing in intelligence, but a shade arbitrary.

A Happy Death Albert Camus

a novel by

A powerful and haunting narrative which traces the career of the murderer Mersault, showing how he finally conquers happiness and retains it even in death.

Camus' early work, now published for the first time, is translated by Richard Howard.

£1.75



Hamish Hamilton

Struggling to release God

FRANCO CORDERO:

Opus

192pp. £2.500.

L'Epistola al Romani

Antropologia del cristianesimo

340pp. £4.000.

Turin: Einaudi.

Franco Cordero's third novel, *Opus*, and his "anthropological analysis of Pauline Christianity", *L'Epistola al Romani*, both dissect religious belief, the first in human terms, the second wholly intellectually.

Father Mofa, the fragile, appealing hero of *Opus*, is first seen recovering, as it seems, from a four-month attack of nephritis which has drained him of energy and dissolved his faith. He is a Jesuit, absorbed for most of the past twenty-eight years in mathematics. As a young priest he had successfully stimulated faith in others; now he can no longer understand what led him to believe himself. He is determined to find out by a mental journey *à rebours*; plans to cross-question the now successful Luca, whom he had once so effectively convinced, the Dean of his College and the others who propelled him into a life he now regards with bewilderment and incredulity.

But Luca avoids him; he appears only after Mofa's death, savagely triumphant at the collapse of his former instructor, whose disbelief he would have found embarrassing. Mofa had supposed he convinced Luca by his decisive manner: "I command you to take Communion. The responsibility is mine," and by his intellectual arguments. He had not realized that the gap between intellectual and required belief had been crossed for the first time in precisely that conversation which had left Mofa himself least con-

vinced: a novice, Luca had reasoned, should not insist on his objections, they can be left as a residue of interesting points and memories to be taken up later. Instead, they accumulate under dust-sheets of ever-milder irony.

Mofa survives only six days of his "convalescence" in the small town where he grew up and was ordained. He alternates between lucid periods when, alone or in dialogue with colleagues and superiors, he probes unflinchingly into beliefs and intellectual reflexes which had once been sacrosanct guidelines and now appear grotesque, and increasingly frequent descents into chaotic dream and partial hallucination. Unable to cope either with his illness or his inquest on his past life, he becomes more and more reckless and a defenceless prey to dreams and sensory distortion. But he acquires an intellectual grandeur, as he plays out his double ordeal without self-pity.

A sense of rapid and inevitable decline, and of a situation dense with private meaning, involves the reader deep in Mofa's predicament. Those around him, totalling for favours or sizing him up as a possibly useful pawn in their own careers, are drawn with admirable economy and incisiveness. Physiological collapse and psychological liberation are perfectly interwoven, and Mofa's growing detachment transfixes his mockers in their predatory gestures.

The intellectual exchanges in *Opus* are made startlingly effective by their abrupt irony and dramatic denouements. The title itself refers to the process by which the alchemists claimed to free God from matter, a process demanding a vigilance of intellectual and emotional discipline. "God", now a name for whatever commands allegiance above self-interest, is, we see in retrospect, what Mofa has been struggling to release from his past.

from a web of transcendental fictions. As the novel grows, we come to realize, like Mofa, that his new "God" is inhuman matter and is finally revealed as a meaningful set of human and mental relationships.

Just as Mofa now sees conventional religion as a system aimed at exorcizing thought, so Signor Cordero's analysis in *L'Epistola al Romani* demonstrates that not only Paul but also the major Christian theologians after him necessarily aimed to suppress thought. Within the conceptual framework provided by Paul and largely taken over by his successors, thought is something dangerously subversive. The poverty of theology since Luther and Calvin is a proof of their success.

After his conversion, Paul reacted violently against the rabbinical concept of the Law, to be obeyed and respected by good works. But no real escape was possible. The accumulation of merit through works makes way for "faith", the ideal substitute, because it is God's prerogative, not ours. In the justification through faith which Paul makes the cardinal point of his doctrine, Christ's crucifixion is cast as a perpetual process of redemption, while "grace", apparently a gift, is seen on examination to be a state of mind. The first concept operates at a blatantly magical level, the second refers to a fact, a predisposition towards credulity, incompatible with moral evaluation.

Paul, however, requires total passivity in the believer for the coming of grace; the intellect, by implication, must be stilled. The only agent is God; no path is left to the believer except that of intellectual extinction. As a moral recommendation this is, incidentally, illogical, because Paul's view of God (God plans everything, we decide nothing) guarantees predestination; "how-

ever badly we act our parts, we can be sure our performance will be perfect". The contrary would imply that God is not master of the human drama he has set in motion and would leave the human mind an independent centre of decision able to "save" itself.

To see the real implications of Pauline theology, which Paul himself often sidesteps, we can go to Luther and Calvin. Luther, unafraid of calling things by their proper names, tells us that "God wants the believer to throw Reason's head back and strangle the beast", as this, of all practices, is the one "most appreciated by him". Calvin's theory of predestination, which so many Christians find emotionally repellent, is shown to be a logical elaboration of Paul's premises.

As to God's sacrifice of Christ, Paul asks us, in effect, to believe that an eternally irascible father of the universe, who had predisposed Adam to sin and, up until the fatal affair with the apple held him off by divine intervention, felt uncontrollable loathing for a form of behaviour—sin—for which he himself was responsible. To placate his millennial ire he sacrifices his own son, who was faultless, out of simultaneous flow of unbounded love for a mankind, which, on Paul's view, is unrelentingly sinful. The cause of the Crucifixion is thus God's anger and God's love for the same object, mankind, which presupposes sado-masochism.

God's love, on this model, is not devoted into human freedom or independence, but calls for intellectual passiveness and emotional submission, so that God can work an infusion of "grace" which occurs or does not occur as God decides. "The situation is loaded with mockery: if you believe, you are saved, but the only ones who can believe are those God allows to believe."

In a short space, one can only hope to touch on some of the arguments deployed in a book that, with ideas, Signor Cordero's Spitzerian literary analysis, taken from the precise wording of a chopped into appropriate segments, he moves on into a philological and logical analysis until Paul's premises are set in a vastly wider philosophical and anthropological context. He then closes in again on phrase and logical nexus, with a reader now far better equipped to judge the rhetoric and argument of what they are worth.

Signor Cordero's analysis focuses on each small group of verses and scans the surrounding thematic landscape like a radar and thought usually treated with great respect are here subjected to the detailed scrutiny which is the best literary criticism gives in a profane text. The result is a devastating account of the intellectual shortcomings of Christian theology. Apt and frequent quotations from Calvin, Luther, Aquinas, Augustine, Sanday and Headlam, Nietzsche, Schweitzer, Freud, Heidegger, Abelard, Jung and others add a rich historical perspective and body to the analysis without slipping into ornamentation. Signor Cordero has a subtle and elegant humour, while the shocks of theory produced by brilliant juxtaposition are even thicker on the page than in his *Trattato di decomposizione* (reviewed here on November 1971).

After reading *Opus*, one is ready to argue that Italy now has a major novelist. One finishes *Epistola al Romani* sure that no self-respecting Roman should leave it unread, and that a satisfactory answer to the thesis will require a radical examination of the eschatological content of Christianity.

CONSIDERABLE part of Douglas Dunn's first book, *Terry Street*, had to do with what Dunn himself called "the family and the ordinary": was observed of northern urban life, exact and circumstantial, but also touched a special quality that lifted them above the general run of dour reports. For one thing, his was that of a "comer-in" who was living as solid work-aholic but more importantly because he was not a Yorkshireman but another quality of the *Terry Street* poems was that they had a voice of their own: a wryly understated, ticking off the oblique details with a sort of affective distrust.

The second volume, *The Happier*, in some extent travels further from the world of the first. Dunn had shown himself capable of elegant invention, in such poems as "Poem in Praise of the Street" in *Terry Street*: a bravura performance, well away from back and low lives. There is a deepening of this conscious extension of the very mannered and richly textured "Morning Bedroom", "Spoken by Six", and the curiously titled "Peter Melancholy", a poem dedicated to fellow-denizens of Mr Dunn's publishing house. All three are ambitious failures, and by different kinds of literary touches of surrealism.

"Death", attempts minimalist impressionism ("Fables", "Alternative"), and a light-tipped bit of oblique parody ("The Hull"). Mr Dunn has certainly made his nose is not permeable down among the "dogshit, mud, girls" so contemptuously characterized by a recent poet.

But the real strengths of the new are developments of the *Terry Street* vein, not breaks with it; and Mr Dunn amply and convincingly fulfils his promise. Some of the poems are still in that same "Backwaters" style. "The Mashed", "Midweek Matins", "Under the Stone", "The Now", but each is very much its own poem, each is done with an absolute sureness. Beyond that, excitingly, are some that touch on a marriage ("Five Men Married"), "Modern Love", a childhood ("Guerrillas", "The War"), going so with a wealth of exactness of image. Best of all the longer, ruminative, and slightly ironic but still tender poem that one might call moralizing: "The Garden", "Fixed".

DOUGLAS DUNN:

The Happier Life

72pp. Faber and Faber. £1.50.

D. J. ENRIGHT:

Daughters of Earth

63pp. Chatto and Windus:

Hogarth Press. £1.50.

DEREK MAHON:

Lives

39pp. Oxford University Press.

Paperback, 90p.

ADRIENNE RICH:

Leaflets

71pp. Chatto and Windus:

Hogarth Press. £1.05.

B. S. JOHNSON:

Poems Two

61pp. Trigram. £1.75 (paperback, £1).

The Happier Life

Looking at his childhood landscapes, he writes:

And though I change, and sunlight's never

The same again, or woods so dark,

And active generations cry, "Forget!"

These are the fields of love and death,

And cannot change, were meant to be

Forever there distorctly.

The fixed and visionary part of me.

This is eloquent testimony of how far Douglas Dunn has come from the creaking bedspreads of *Terry Street*.

D. J. Enright doesn't develop: he goes on doing his own quirky, funny, mordantly indignant thing (this is his eighth book of verse), ranging round the world, particularly the Far Eastern bits of it, and always as a champion of common sense against cant. As usual, there are too many short cuts, cheap jibes, half-hearted digs in the ribs, and

Moving around

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instances of sheer smart-alec, in a rough and ready verse that hasn't quite made up its mind how much it has to do with Lawrence's *Pansies* and how much with Ogden Nash.

There are no such questions of demurs with the straight comic stuff—"Metropolitan Water Bawd", for example, or Mr Enright's fooling with the typewriter in a poem called "An Aw Erra" which must have Dom Sylvester Houedard twitching in his cell:

TAB e or not TAB e

Le, the e?

Tygyl tygyl burning bride

Y, this is L

Nor-my-outfit

Anywan can od it

U2 can b a

Tepot.

But matters become problematical when Mr Enright is out to make a point or draw a moral, as he usually is. For such an avowed ironist, he

protests too much: at other times, the incident or observation he presents is no more than a shrug, an "Mmm" or an "Uh" or, more vigorously, a "Pshaw". Frail anecdotes support rickety poems, and a whole book of Mr Enright's leaves one feeling testy about how knowing, sane, disabused and disenchanted he is about hypocrisy, doubletalk, and all conceivable manifestations of propaganda and bullshit. As one-shot entertainments, most of them are excellent: periodical poems, catching and holding the eye among the drifting lumber of political articles and book reviews. Taken together, they tend to pall.

No one has satisfactorily explained how it is that a whole young generation of Irish poets—Heaney, Mahon, Longley, Muldoon and others—is apparently devoted to the well-made poem at a time when their English, Scottish and to a

smaller degree Welsh contemporaries have almost entirely thrown it overboard in favour of grim fragments or of vapid manderings. The longest poem in Derek Mahon's new book, "Beyond Howth Head", is of a shapely fluency which sets the pattern for the verse-letters of Seamus Heaney and Michael Longley: behind it all there is perhaps the shadow of the Robert Lowell of "Near the Ocean" and "Waking Early Sunday Morning". Whatever the explanation, these new poems of Mr Mahon's have an attractive suppleness and wit. What stops them from going beyond that is a common quality of being marginalia, literary notes ("An Image from Beckett", "J. P. Donleavy's Dublin", "After Cavafy", "Edward Munch"). Not that one pays much heed to those remarks of Kingsley Amis's years ago, about all the topics and subjects one shouldn't write about: but "secondhand" often implies "shop-soiled", and Mr Mahon's eyes and words are so fresh that it seems a pity to let them steam up with literariness.

When the broken

Wreath bowls are speckled with rain

And the grass grows wild for want of a

Oh, then a few will remember with

affection

Dry bread, mousetrap cheese, and the

satisfaction

Of picking long butts from a wet

gutter

Like daisies from a clover field in

summer.

Adrienne Rich began as an elegant

American—there is nothing more elegant than an elegant American: of Wallace Stevens—in the early 1950s, but since then she has loosened up, gone confessional, and (though the progression should not occasion surprise) lost a good deal of her intensity. Whinnies slide into incoherences, incoherences into ingratiating beseechings, and the clamorous female emerges:

Something broken

I need

By someone

Love

Next year

will I remember what

This anger

unreal

yet

has to be gone through

There is something firmer about the

poems that derive, however remotely, from foreign originals

(Dutch, Russian, Yiddish, Urdu), and these give one hope that Adrienne Rich will recover herself again.

The blurb to B. S. Johnson's book suggests that his "poetry is a complement to rather than an extension of his work as a novelist, playwright and film director". However one looks at this it is not encouraging, and the poems themselves confirm an impression of a man scratching away in the margins of whatever talent he may have.

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Cornell 316 pages £5.85

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Cornell 290

The record of a reign

STANLEY AYLING:

George the Third
510pp. Collins. £4.50.

ALAN LLOYD:

The Wickedest Age

The Life and Times of George III.

369pp. Newton Abbot: David and Charles. £2.95.

Samuel Pepys once remarked that the learning of one of his friends wanted "a little fling". The same rough edge of much historical writing about the politics of George III—not excluding the twentieth-century contributions to these matters—too often irritates the average reader. Conspicuous among the many merits of Stanley Ayling's fine biography of the King is that he gives us a rest from the roughness. Instead of dealing out sledge-hammer blows against Sir John Fortescue for his manner of editing the King's letters, he politely thanks one of the staff at Windsor for "clarifying certain difficulties in Fortescue's text". We know what he means, and feel at once easy in his companionship along a difficult road.

In a front-page article which was published in the *TLR* on November 22, 1957, the writer alluded to the wealth of historical material available for the researcher into this period of history but commented that many of those using the material "lacked both the talent and the inclination to use historical imagination."

Nowhere is the justice of this charge more conspicuous than in the case of George III. We see him buffeted by the Whigs, rescued from their clutches by twentieth-century writers, but he remains as wooden as the King on the chess-board. The battle arrests our attention; absorbed by the "sledge-hammer blows" we lose sight of the King. Now the conspicuous virtue of this biography is that it restores personality to the King. We see him at work, we see him enjoying his recreations, we see him in the centre of his family, we see him discharging the sovereign's task of representation, and we see him battling with illness and madness. Mr Ayling is like a splendid manipulator of a magic-lantern; he displays without preaching and reveals without argument. His book may be described as one of record and statement rather than of deduction and conclusion. We are therefore, as J. B. Bury said in a different connexion, "taken into a

region of speculation in which every reader must make his own chart."

Now those who attempt to chart the character of the King would have to make religion its most prominent feature, but as a component in the formation of character devotion and piety are not easily comprehended by the twentieth century. The present century has, in this respect, something in common with the courtier who, attending the King in chapel with only the clergyman present, grumblingly said: "And there we three freeze it out together." During the King's reign the influence of the clergy and of men of learning was paramount, and in George III they found a character after their own hearts. As early as 1777 we read that Parson Woodforde "had my blunderbuss fired off by Bill [his nephew] above two hands high three times in honour of the King's birthday." We can imagine the effect of these explosions on the unsuspecting villagers of Weston; the noise advertised the affections of the Rector; it encouraged others to share his partiality.

One consequence of piety and devotion must be stressed; it is that they sometimes create a barrier between those who practise them and the ordinary run of humanity. Here Alan Lloyd's book, *The Wickedest Age*, is in point. While the pre-eminence of Mr Ayling's book is unaffected by the presence of a lighter and not always water-tight vessel, that vessel gives the reader a voyage over the darker waters of English life. In particular it serves to remind us of the contrast between the piety of the King and the noisy raffishness of a section of his subjects. Perhaps we could say with truth that the King was afraid of the contemporary world, and pictured it as the nineteenth-century poet wrote: "Fly our paths, our feverish contact fly! He had no friends—in a sense, no equals—for he moved among those dependent on him—his family, the Court and neighbours at Windsor. He never invited anyone to dine—though his hurried abstemious dinners would have been a sore trial to the robust Georgian appetites of his guests with those fearful dishes of mutton and turnip.

This also must be said. In public—that is to say, at levees and formal appearances—the King, as was true also of his eldest son, said more with his lips than he felt in his heart. No doubt that affability was a welcome change from the

growing remarks of his grandfather, but what did it amount to? For what are we to make of the King's treatment of his friends and family? We could only excuse his treatment of "my Dearest Friend"—Bute—by saying that, like old men, sovereigns forget. Bute was much distressed by the change in the King; the Scotsman seems to have lacked the philosophy of the German, Stockmar, who once said: "In the case of Royalties, so soon as one is neither useful or amusing one's only course is to disappear." It may not be true, though it is recorded that the King said to his wife when she came to England: "Never be alone with my mother; she is an artful woman." His cold and formal tribute to his grandfather, when he died—"the just concern which I have felt in my own breast"—contrasts with the surprising words of George II on his accession, when he referred to George I as "my dearest Father," or to the rather touching words of George IV, when on coming to the throne he paid tribute to "my beloved father."

And, whatever the follies and foibles of his sons may have been, did he ever show that they had a revolutionary interest in the power and prestige of the monarchy? The last words uttered by Chatham before he collapsed in the House of Lords bear on this point; they were made in reference to the loss of America. He said that "he would call all the young Princes—the Prince of Wales—he was sixteen—and his brothers to tell the House if they would consent to the loss of their heritage—the dismemberment of this most ancient and noble monarchy."

For is not this the heart of the case against the King? He diminished the standing and the authority of the monarchy which had been handed down to him by George II.

The Duke turns sour

Historical Memoirs of the Duc de Saint-Simon

Volume 3: 1715-1723

Edited and translated by Lucy Norton.

522pp. Hamish Hamilton. £6.

With this volume Lucy Norton has completed her excellent abridged version of Saint-Simon, a most welcome and successful enterprise. Like its predecessors, this is a handsomely produced and well-illustrated book, and the translator has copied very skilfully with the highly individual prose style of the original. An English reader ignorant of the French text should still receive a vivid impression of the literary qualities which have made the *Memoirs* a classic, and come to feel their compulsive readability. The enormous bulk of the full version has necessitated extensive cutting, but this is perhaps less a cause for regret in this volume than in the previous ones, and one can have few quarrels with Miss Norton's choice. The character of Saint-Simon's writing was changing, and the apparently inexhaustible flow of anecdotes, malicious asides and character sketches diminished in the later stages. This section of the original is often harder going than usual, and one is correspondingly grateful for sensible editing.

The note of sourness which appears increasingly in the account of the Regency years is easy enough to understand when Saint-Simon's own position at this period is taken into account. After all the frustrations of his early manhood, dominated by the apparently tireless willpower of Louis XIV, the duke seemed to have his chance at last. Admittedly his white horse and patron, the duc de Bourgogne, had died before he could inherit; but the Regent Orleans was a playboy friend whose ear was always open to Saint-Simon. Now that the *vile bourgeoisie* had lost their royal protector, the traditional supporters and advisers of the monarchy, the peers, could expect to come into their own. From the start, however, it became plain that they lacked the ability and the will to assert themselves, and the irrelevance of Saint-

JAMES LAVER:

The Age of Illusion

Manners and Morals 1750-1848

197pp including 151 illustrations. Weidenfeld and Nicolson. £3.

James Laver, bending to his task with the support of a true understanding of European civilization and a mastery of diverse authorities on the period, runs us at a rattling pace through the half-centuries on either side of 1800. Occasionally the reader may feel rather like poor Alice in the grip of the Red Queen; the familiar is noticed but there is scarcely time to survey the unknown. The author brings out the point that Europe through the eighteenth century enjoyed a civilization which was aristocratic and French, though possibly the atheism of the French—or at least their incurable flippancy about religion—was certainly not acceptable in England. Even Horace Walpole was shocked by scoffing comments on the Old Testament at a dinner-party in Paris; recording this he said that he would not suffer such things at his own table if there were a single footman in the room. Possibly Mr Laver accepts too easily the conventional view of the low state of religious opinion in England; he quotes "Parson" Woodforde on food but surely the piety of that God-fearing man should not be overlooked.

We are certainly right in thinking of Europe at this time as having a common civilization—though possibly it was less civilized if one changed to live elsewhere than in England or outside the aristocracy and its influence. Goldsmith in

Lisbon saw three women burnt to death for heresy and an old woman similarly dealt with for being a witch. Yet, as Mr Laver reminds us, it is not for this generation to hold up pious but bloody hands in horror. We should bear in mind that more people have died by violence in our own century than in the previous three centuries put together. Does not each age hypocritically condemn the cruelties of former days in which it has ceased to indulge?

It is difficult to see exactly what Mr Laver has in mind when he chooses his period "The Age of Illusion". He is perhaps driving home for us the truth that the shining exterior of fashion and manners, which rather oddly was to attract the intelligentsia a century later, covered but did not conceal the vices of the aristocracy and possibly the squalor of other classes. That exterior was shaken by Revolutionary morality which in turn suffered from the illusion that the guillotine was a specific terror against immorality and frivolity. The Revolutionaries were wrong and the author is left to thank God for *l'homme moyen sensuel*.

Another point that might encourage belief in an age of illusion is the author's account of the great banquets enjoyed by Kings and Aldermen while the population of nearly every European country was on the verge of starvation. But possibly late eighteenth-century aristocracy, using that word in its true sense of "the best", would have echoed the words of one of his number (Edmund Burke): "I have read the book of life for a long time, and I have read other books in little . . . What is to come is wiser hands than ours." Was not that the real illusion?

interesting to compare the duke's criticisms of Orleans as a political leader with Orleans's view of the weakness and vacillation of the duke on one side. If Saint-Simon served his political virginity, he was also something of an old maid, scolding others for sins he had never dared to commit. "Nothing . . . nothing" sums up his political career; by refusing to push himself forward and take the consequences he doomed his own future. The sense of failure hangs over this last section of the *Memoirs*, and often gives them a depth which increases their interest. Saint-Simon's struggles to make Orleans reform, and his misadventure and sorrow at the Regent's sudden death, are described with usual feeling, and have a deeply moving quality in consequence. It was the epitaph not only for a friend who had failed him but for his own vanished hopes.

Miss Norton's version of the masterpiece should give enormous pleasure to specialist and general reader alike. Omitted sections are usefully summarized, and the notes and an excellent index are a great service to the reader. A few slips should be noted: the definition of Farmers General and archbishop is misleading, and there are, incidentally, some errors over chronology, particularly in the case of the Boulton family. These are trivial points, however, compared with Miss Norton's achievement in catching much of the true voice of the great memoirist.

James O. Richards's *Perry Pageant under Queen Anne* (1969, Athens: University of Georgia Press, \$8.50) is a short academic study analysing the material produced by the English general elections of 1701, 1705, 1708, 1710 and 1713. Professor Richards sets out to show the contemporary view of party politics from the primary sources, and concludes that, while the Whigs and Tories certainly saw themselves as parties, all concerned did their best to disguise the implications for monarchy, parliament, and nation.

ANTHROPOLOGY

Money Needham (Editor):
Rethinking Kinship and Marriage
Tavistock. £4.

Marriage is the essence of anthropology. Anthropologists seek information in alien societies and from their own, all in the name of gaining understanding and perspective when they come to talk about society in general. The study of kinship inevitably came to have an important place in this enterprise, for kinship systems are some of the exotic phenomena with which anthropologists have to deal. Strange people are expected to worship strange gods, to have alien customs, to use unfamiliar means to gain their livelihood; but surely mothers and fathers, uncles and aunts must be the same everywhere. If observant writers have been misled at least since Herodotus that is not the case. The biology of population and reproduction may be the same for all peoples, but kinship systems which to some extent contain these facts (but cannot by any means be reduced to them) are as varied as the extraordinary unevenness of human culture makes them. However, it is not the discovery of the exotic which seems intuitively familiar, but accounts for the prominent place which kinship has occupied in anthropological speculation. There are two major impulses behind it. It was soon perceived that the ways in which other societies classified their kinmen, however exotic, were systems and that these systems related in widely differing parts of the world. This not only called for explanation but seemed to offer a useful field for generalization and theoretical advance. The study of kinship could become a real test, since the systems themselves, and certainly the biological substrata in which they were rooted, were amenable of formal, even of mathematical analysis. This powerful method could then be used either to test the history of man or to develop theories about his cultural evolution. Above all the study of kinship systems promised to elucidate what is perhaps the fundamental problem in anthropology: namely the relation between nature, that is the biological and psychological make-up of man, and the cultural, or the conventional ways of thinking and acting peculiar to individual societies.

As if these theoretical inducements were not already enough, anthropologists discovered when they began to do field-work at the end of the last century that the people they studied expressed a wide variety of relationships in the idiom of kinship. In many small-scale societies it was hard to determine whether for example a political leader was recognized as a chief because so many people claimed him as a kinsman or because he mattered to the people themselves, who were sometimes puzzled by the importance of anthropologists and their interminable questions about such distinctions. Meanwhile the anthropologists began to accumulate and classify data, and to realize that kinship, while claiming to deal eventually with the human mind, was for the moment a convenient way of talking about social relations on societies which were not themselves called "kinship based". The study of kinship systems thus became a central part of the curriculum for neophytes in the subject. It is difficult nowadays to remember that such high hopes were placed in kinship studies such a short time ago. But now, and it was not from the primary sources, and it was not from the study of the Whigs and Tories, that anthropologists have begun to realize that kinship is a term of art, a term of art which has been used to disguise the implications for monarchy, parliament, and nation.

The kin game

Rethinking Kinship and Marriage starts with this realization, tries to diagnose the cause of the problem and to suggest various remedies for it. It is therefore appropriate, though somewhat unusual, that it should be dedicated over his protests to one of the contributors to the volume, Edmund Leach, who sounded the alarm nearly twenty years ago. It is equally appropriate that the volume should be edited by Rodney Needham, who is a recognized authority in the field.

It is very much Dr Needham's book. His long introductory essay and his own short contribution make up over a third of the volume. If one adds the papers on the Intimacy of the Wik-mungkan and the Purum, all of which deal with issues that Dr Needham has raised, then more than half of the book is directly linked to his own work. The result is a paradox. While some essays argue convincingly for a radical break with the past, others continue to deal with old issues in conventional ways. Dr Needham starts off by making a cogent case for the radical break. He argues that the categories usually employed in the analyses of kinship systems are unsatisfactory and should be critically examined, if not discarded altogether. We cannot even say with any degree of precision what a "kinship system" is. This is largely because anthropologists have customarily defined kinship in certain ways which implied a priori definition of its content. Kinship has variously been considered a codification of genealogical ties, a means of defining corporate groups, a means of distinguishing descent categories, a vehicle for producing alliance systems and so on. Each definition turns out to be insufficiently general and thus unable to deal with all systems. Dr Needham argues that we should go back and start again from sure ground. Kinship systems are clearly systems of categories according to which each society divides up all or part of the social world. We should find out case by case what the boundaries of the system are and what information is encoded in the categories. In fact we should probably stop calling them "kinship systems" altogether, since the term, even when used only as a convenience with all the correct mental reservations, tends to mislead its users into thinking genealogically, whereas the "kinship systems" of some societies do not appear to be genealogical ideologies.

This is the heart of the revisionist argument. Dr Needham here gives powerful and scholarly expression to views which are now fairly commonplace in anthropology but have not yet been systematically expounded. Only, he goes farther than most people. "Kinship" is an unsatisfactory label and we should try and get away from it. Marriage, descent, incest, these too are impure concepts which are summarily banished to the anthropological dustbin. The heads of those who dallied too long with these notions must also roll. Radcliffe-Brown, whose reputation as a kinship expert has somehow lingered on long after the bankruptcy of his ideas has been perceived, is wittingly demolished. Max Gluckman and Meyer Fortes are dismissed for imprecision and sterility respectively. Lounsbury is finished off by Occam's razor and Schneider is taken to task for having accused Dr Needham of "gross manipulation" of the Purum data. But some curious tailsmen are allowed to escape unscathed. The formal analysis of kin term sets is still defended, even though all the principles for analysing them have been called into question. Levi-Strauss's atom of kinship and his scheme of affects within it, surely just the type of a priori theory, complete with crude formulation, which should have been sent to the guillotine, is unaccountably still held to be useful. Still, the call for a new

beginning is sounded loud and clear. It is, alas, easier to demand a fresh start than to show how it can be done. Martin Southwold and Peter Riviere grapple manfully with the task of how to avoid the conceptual pitfalls of the terms "kinship" and "marriage" respectively. Dr Southwold seriously investigates the consequences of making "relationship systems" of a certain kind the focus of his analysis and suggests that the systems he has in mind could be referred to as systems of congeniality. Dr Riviere goes over much old ground to show how unsatisfactory the concept "marriage" is as an analytical tool and suggests that we should examine the consequences of treating this sort of relationship in its wider context. There are a large number of possible relationships between people of opposite sexes and each society sanctions a certain bundle or certain bundles of them in what we might call marriage. But these bundles vary from society to society and can only be properly understood in terms of the society's total view of the relations between sexes. The argument is essentially a postscript to Professor Leach's paper on the definition of marriage, written in 1957.

Professor Leach himself contributes a characteristically jaunty paper which takes its inspiration from Roman Jakobson and argues that phonological differences between terms for different relationships might signal differences in affect. Anthropologists, he suggests, might look into this instead of grinding away in the traditional manner, searching for social correlates to relationship categories. Then again, they might not, for he himself is only half convinced and one suspects that few anthropologists will bethink their research time on this hypothesis either.

Here, all of a sudden, the rethinking temporarily stops. The volume plunges into a series of papers on the Intimacy, the Wik-mungkan and the Purum, where terminologies are analysed and institutions such as prescriptive marriages deduced therefrom, as if this one corner of the conceptual world of kinship studies had escaped the earthquake of Dr Needham's introduction. Clearly notions such as "prescriptive marriage" and "lineal terminology" are as ripe for rethinking as all the others, but only Anthony Forge seems to perceive this in his puzzled rejoinder to Francis Korn's elegantly old-fashioned analysis of the Intimul.

It is only when we come to the final papers in the volume that we get an inkling of where rethought kinship analysis might lead. T. O. Beidelman's discussion of incest notions among the Kaguru develops, in the best tradition of category analysis, into a discussion of Kaguru ideas in general. Robin Fox squarely faces the central problem of the volume, namely what to do with terminologies which encode more than the analyst wishes to define as "kinship". His discussion of *Stier's Child as Plant* on the Indonesian island of Rott shows again how a fresh approach to "kinship" can lead to a revealing and well-grounded elucidation of the ideology of another people.

The volume might otherwise have ended in disappointment. Its initial indictment of kinship studies is a forceful presentation of a view which is now being increasingly accepted in anthropological circles. It is a view moreover which can be reached on straightforward anthropological principles without recourse, as in the early essays of the volume, to Wittgenstein, Frege or Tarski. But after the diagnosis the reader will naturally look for the cure, and it is in the final, ostensibly least theoretical papers that this is best discerned. Perhaps there is a moral in this, or perhaps it merely tells us something about the way in which anthropology makes its advances.

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Viewpoint

BY IAN HAMILTON

I RECENTLY got a circular letter asking for my views on "how writers as such are treated in the teaching profession". There is apparently to be an inquiry into this important matter and replies are to be incorporated into a statement for the Arts Council.

If you have any experience of teaching in a university, art school, training college or school, I would be very grateful if you could jot down a few notes saying (a) whether you gained from the experience; (b) whether you felt you had been able to give; (c) how the conditions under which you and your students operated could be improved.

Good, if oddly formulated, questions. It's perhaps a pity, though, that I received them when I did. For the past year I have been making weekly (well, almost weekly) trips to the University of Hull. My role there has been that of Lecturer in Poetry, a post set up four years ago with the help of funds bequeathed by Joseph Compton—the aim being, in fact, to offer a "writer as such" experience of teaching "as a writer" in a university. It might be thought, therefore, that I would have many rich reflections on the topics of the circular—especially since it reached me just as I'd returned from one of my northern safaris. But alas, no. At least, not there and then. The safari in question had yielded one conversation with one student about one poem (his); the bus service that is supposed to shuttle me from my bleak room on the campus to my even bleaker bed in the not so nearby village of Cottingham had been functioning less regularly than usual; and on the way back, someone had shut the buffet bar at Peterborough. Hot-foot and hot-throat, from King's Cross, I replied to the circular with zest and economy: (a) No! (b) No; (c) Don't know.

Which would (had I sent these answers in) have been unhelpful and unfair. After all, it's not—as the Hull librarian has put it—the place's fault; nothing, like something, can happen anywhere. And this had been an exceptionally fruitless trip. On another week, I might easily have seen anything up to four or even five students and would thus have regarded the matter in a wholly different light.

So, to be rational, what is the usefulness of this kind of university hospitality to writers? Who does, or can, it help? I must confess, that looking back over my year at Hull, I tend to take a gloomy view of the whole business. Most of my time there was spent feeling vaguely useless, vaguely guilty—while everyone else was getting on with the serious business of lectures, seminars, and examinations. I was simply there—a creature of

supposed "creativity" who "makes himself available" from time to time in case there should happen to be others around the place who suffer from the same disease. In fact, there were one or two such sufferers, and although most of those who turned up for a consultation only turned up once (such was their disappointment at not being told they were the hottest thing since Leonard Cohen), I can remember isolated occasions when it seemed as if something I said had been of use—but of no greater use than if the young poet in question had dealt with me by correspondence.

By which I mean that there was no continuing interchange. And this raises my first point about such posts. If a poet is going to be planted in a university, a familiar member of the whole university community. The Hull job was in fact designed for precisely this to happen; it provides an office, accommodation and a salary which although it wouldn't get you to many of the town's nightspots very often, is none the less sufficient for modest survival. The sad truth is, though, that most poets are likely to be married, have families, houses, jobs, pension-schemes and all the rest of it; it is not easy to find one who, for the sake of a year in Hull or wherever, is going to uproot himself completely. Hence the compromise which both I, and my predecessor, Peter Porter, settled for—a weekly interruption of our normal lives. Handy for us, in any way, but not likely to result in a deep involvement with the normal lives of the university.

It seems to me that the only solution here will have to be the setting up of posts which run for, say, five years and which offer a competitive salary—with this to offer a university could insist on full-time residence, for such to happen, though, there would have to be an alteration in the way universities regard this kind of appointment. A Hull eminent has been quoted as saying that a poet is about as welcome in most English Departments as a cow would be if it turned up at the headquarters of United Dairies, and indeed before going to Hull I was told (I'm still not quite sure how reliably) that the English Department had been the only department to oppose the continuance of the Poetry Lecture-ships (Compton's money having been shifted to another university). Hull had now to pay for the thing itself. As it turned out, I felt none of the handful of chores I undertook within the department were the most rewarding of my duties; for a start, they were actually attended, and by what looked like oppo. The students

A series of four lectures on Yeats in my first term drew crowds the like of which I was not to see again during my stay, and a handful of seminars on the background to modern poetry were similarly graced. The simple reason for this was that I had been made official; I was of the department and I was dealing with the syllabus. I had only to compare the Yeats crowds with the trickle of loyal friends who attended what were laughably called my "public lectures" to know the secret of my success.

And this is what I mean by hoping for an alteration in the way universities handle these so-called creative posts. The university has to believe that there is something concrete that a visiting writer can offer, and that whatever it is can be offered within the normal working framework of literary studies. One doubts that any university, whatever lip-service it might pay, really does believe this. Why, when there are a hundred contenders for every new academic post in English, should a poet slip in by the back door? Why should a mere bard be let loose on Eliot, say, when old son-and-so has had a corner on the *Four Quartets* for donkey's years? It's not easy, and I'm not necessarily prepared to say that most poets do have more to say about poetry than most dons (indeed, quite often one finds that they say the same things anyway). But what does seem certain is that if you are going to have poets in universities they are going to have to be made respectable: you are going to have to want to have them there. Simply agreeing to accept the conditions of some embarrassing bequest is worse than useless.

Bearing all of which in mind, it is with—shall we say?—mixed feelings that I now gather that Hull is not to continue with the Poetry Lectureship. Everybody tells me that I would be over-bold to claim the entire credit for the post's demise. Typical, I reflect, to be denied even that crumb of effectiveness.

On the subject of how poets live, it's a gloomy fact that as more opportunities for making money "as a poet" crop up, the more paranoid this already most paranoid of professions is likely to become. Those three-quarters empty church halls, those boarded-up organizers who can't even buy you a decent drink, those school dinners throughout which two grizzled matrons talk across you about some boy's latest delinquency, those "question-times" at which the town laureate can't understand why Every poet I know has one or another such grim tale—the worst, perhaps, being one I heard the other day about a residential weekend course at which neither alcohol nor nicotine was permitted on the premises. Around midnight, the poet found himself sitting in a room full of amiable schoolteachers, and dreaming anxiously of distant joys. To his horror, he discovered that his dry lips had begun to move, though no

sound was able to escape them. The ugly truth then dawned. He was participating in a Sing Song.

Which outbursts, I must confess, the rigours I myself experienced recently at a similar poetry session. The idea of this particular gathering, according to the brochure, was that students should encounter the vibrant mysteries of the imagination. Along with two "poetry poets", they were to be lodged in a converted farmhouse and over a period of four days exposed to the piercing rays of creativity that would be unable to resist having crack at it themselves. The result, by sympathetic guidance, was much other material, thereby enlarging the field in which they could be studied as a poet.

After about twenty-four hours became clear that this prospect wasn't even good for a laugh. The majority of the students had stayed up in the Lounge with a record player and a deck of cards and were launched into a poker game to which I, as a poet, was not invited. Sensibilities thus hidden, they then began making ritual protest noises about the "the course" was being "run" by a co-ordinator and I having timidly suggested that maybe they would be better breaking up the game for an hour or two to talk about Poetry. This suggestion was seen by some as a tyrannical attempt to impose teacher-student relationship in a thing that they had come to hate. I, on the other hand, seem to have been present of them at poker, there didn't seem much that one could say, or was say, to that. Not much.

In fact, things did improve as the course wore on, and by the end almost everybody there. But what lingers in the mind is the discrepancy between the actuality of these sessions and the rapid, well-intentioned rhetoric with which they are motivated. And, most vividly of all, the sycophantic, salesman postures which the hired poets are coerced into which they wish to earn their keep.

But then, as they used to say, they always America. They know how to make a poet feel like he's a somebody. Unfortunately, even a source of encouragement is beginning to prove unboundedly. I've been hawking my meagre credentials round various East Coast universities, in the hope of fixing brief, profitable tours, and although I've found sufficient takers to make the trip feasible, more than a few have written back with dire warnings about budget cuts, limited programming, and the like. My favourite reply, though, has to be the one received from Columbia: "A college boy going on the bum stringency, security problems during the prime evening lecture hours, a student apathy—have persuaded to abandon lectures for a while."

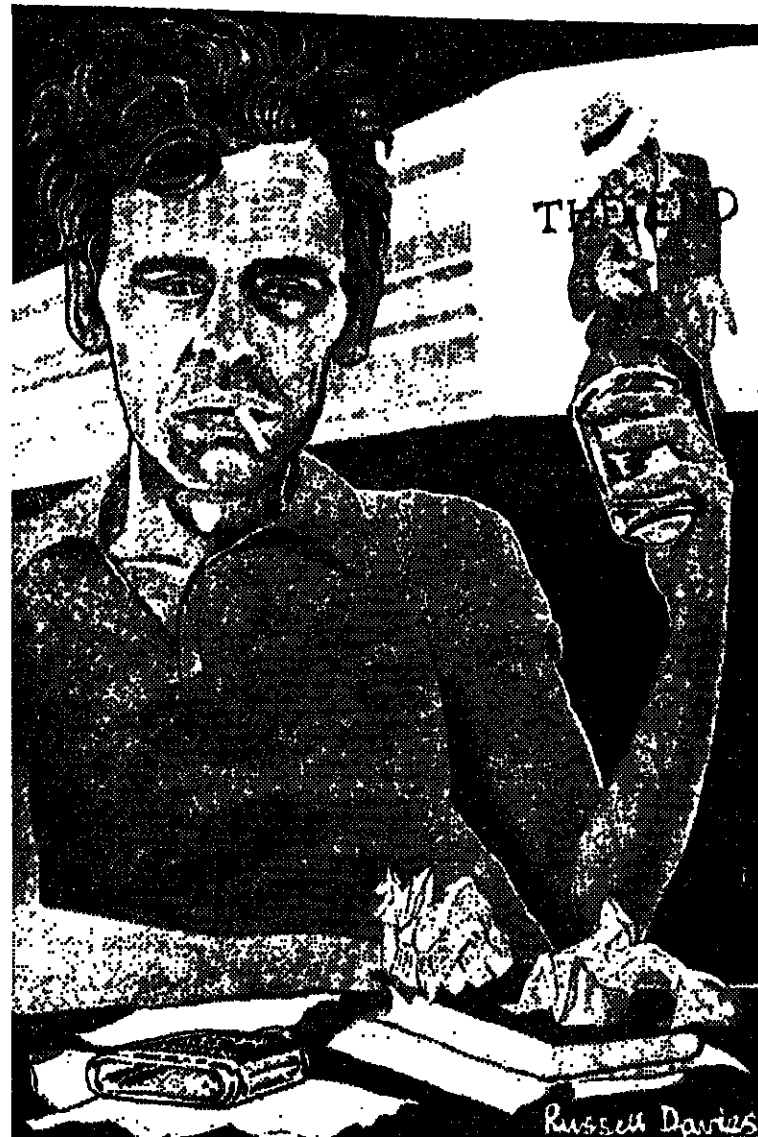
Death in the Desert". From the *Harvard*, 1930, issue of the *Harvard*, is the story of a young black-hiding through the slum, a college boy going on the bum stringency, security problems during the prime evening lecture hours, a student apathy—have persuaded to abandon lectures for a while."

to make talking a pastime. I sat down on my cot and decided that it was rather less than necessary on days like this. After a couple of hours, I considered the manifold advantages of being conspicuously a cripple. After another hour I had the idea of holding up a sign: "SORE EAR PLEASE"

The humour reminds us of one previous writer, Lardner, and of several subsequent writers, especially Salinger, whose early stories like "This Sandwich Has No Mayonnaise" echo the tone precisely (consider the way that story's platoon sergeant translates his man-management problems into movie marquee slogans like "OUR MUST GO—FROM THE TRUCK OF THE SAME NAME"). But the sore ear turns out to be a lot more than just a comic device. It's because of the nagging twinges he is suffering that the narrator decides to make no protest when the driver who picks him up eventually steps on the accelerator instead of the brake and races past the desperate Negro's outstretched arms. Agee is making the subtle point that we are likely to treat ourselves as a special case when we are in pain, and defer our duties on the assumption that the Fates, or our better selves, will understand. Like the bad tooth in *Darkness at Noon*, the bull resists, all attempts to make something symbolic of it—it's just a fact, leading to more facts, in a sequence of marvelously analytical probings and worryings. Agee was twenty when he wrote the story. An ounce more talent and he would have sunk into the earth. Another *Admiral* story, "They That Sow in Sorrow Shall Reap",

is similarly... well, precocious is the wrong word; prodigious. The young Agee character is immersed in a dreadful boarding-house, whose master is an aging and barely repressed queer. They strike a bargain, in which the old man is allowed to adore but not to touch, beyond the occasional friendly squeeze of the shoulder. Agee introduces a young acquaintance into the boarding-house. The old man tries the friendly squeeze and gets slapped in the mouth. All the tacit understandings upon which the house has previously run, and especially the relationship between the old man and his wife, promptly collapse. Agee the character is reduced to tacit agonies of self-reproach and regret, while Agee the writer records the to-ing and fro-ing in the shattered household with customary mastery. Supposing Agee had dropped dead the following year—wouldn't we be justified, on this showing, in the conjecture that he might have been one of the great writers of the century?

The real tragedy, looking back, is not in the presence of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* or *A Death in the Family* or all the other part of the Fates, or our better selves, will understand. Like the bad tooth in *Darkness at Noon*, the bull resists, all attempts to make something symbolic of it—it's just a fact, leading to more facts, in a sequence of marvelously analytical probings and worryings. Agee was twenty when he wrote the story. An ounce more talent and he would have sunk into the earth. Another *Admiral* story, "They That Sow in Sorrow Shall Reap",



James Agee, by Russell Davies

The perpetual promise of James Agee

is similarly... well, precocious is the wrong word; prodigious. The young Agee character is immersed in a dreadful boarding-house, whose master is an aging and barely repressed queer. They strike a bargain, in which the old man is allowed to adore but not to touch, beyond the occasional friendly squeeze of the shoulder. Agee introduces a young acquaintance into the boarding-house. The old man tries the friendly squeeze and gets slapped in the mouth. All the tacit understandings upon which the house has previously run, and especially the relationship between the old man and his wife, promptly collapse. Agee the character is reduced to tacit agonies of self-reproach and regret, while Agee the writer records the to-ing and fro-ing in the shattered household with customary mastery. Supposing Agee had dropped dead the following year—wouldn't we be justified, on this showing, in the conjecture that he might have been one of the great writers of the century?

The real tragedy, looking back, is not in the presence of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* or *A Death in the Family* or all the other part of the Fates, or our better selves, will understand. Like the bad tooth in *Darkness at Noon*, the bull resists, all attempts to make something symbolic of it—it's just a fact, leading to more facts, in a sequence of marvelously analytical probings and worryings. Agee was twenty when he wrote the story. An ounce more talent and he would have sunk into the earth. Another *Admiral* story, "They That Sow in Sorrow Shall Reap",

He wasn't neurotic enough. If people had hated him more he might have taken revenge; if he had hated himself sufficiently, he might have made redress; as it was, he had only love to drive him forward, and love makes poor fuel in its pure state. It's a heavy irony that through Agee the "positive" creative attitude which people like Archibald MacLeish were currently calling for could well have established its own tradition. That it failed to come about was not just MacLeish's loss but everybody's, not least those who had seen the disingenuousness of the "positive" propaganda but who would be compelled in the future to watch the American novel wave goodbye to everything Agee represented. It's been said that Agee wasn't bored by virtue—another way of saying that he could see what was interesting about normality. When he went down, he took three or four decades of ordinary American life with him, and the middlebrow salvage operations—O'Hara, Cheever and the like—got nowhere near lifting the bulk.

The two "satiric" pieces included in *The Collected Short Prose* are from later in the day and are in a familiar Agee vein of phantasmagoria: the letter from Agee to Macdonald quoted in Macdonald's "Jim Agee, A Memoir" (printed as an appendix to the excellent critical essay on Agee in *Against the American Grain*) gives a better idea of the referential lushness of his intelligence when he allowed it to run wild. There was something compulsive about the way he piled on the detail, and friends who received such letters might well have frowned through their delight—why take so much time and trouble, and to what purpose? Here are some scraps from the letter to Macdonald:

I think *The Brothers Karamazov* deserves the co-operation of all the finest talents in Hollywood and widely resp. all research & expenditure. A falsified replica, complete down to the last (opium)ism, of the Mad Tar Pierre (Charles Laughton). Papa Karamazov (Lionel Barrymore). His comic servant Grigory (Wallace Berry). Grigory's wife (Zuzu Pitts). Smerdyakov (Charles Laughton). Smerdyakov's family, a cat named Tabitha (Ella Lancaster, the bride of Frankenstein). Zossima (Henry B. Walthall). Musov (Malcolm Cowley). In Alyosha's Dream: Alyosha (Fred Astaire), Puck (Wallace Berry), Tiania (Ginger Rogers or James Cagney). Routines by Albertina Rasch. Artificial snow by Jean Cocteau. Entire production supervised by Hugh Walpole. To be played on the world's first Globular Screen, opening at the Hippodrome the night before will be handed out at the north end of the Wilhelmstrasse to anyone who is fool enough to call for them.

Stuff like this reminds us of the many reasons why Peregrine was unassailable—to begin with, he was far funnier. And Peregrine wrote his madcap collages as therapy. Agee at this time (1936) was not involved in Hollywood and had no frustrations to work off, except perhaps the frustration of not being part of it. All this is something cancerous about this side of his talent. It produces cells uncontrollably, and the longer satirical piece included here (called "Dedication Day") and nominally given over to goosing the scientists and politicians responsible for the first atomic bomb) runs away with itself in a fashion simultaneously boring and worrying.

As convincing demonstrations of just how sensitive Agee was there are two small fragments—"Run Over", about a cat hit by a car, and "Give Him Air", about a human car-crash victim dying—which are strictly unbearable; you'd need nerves of steel to read them twice. At the end of the first piece Agee notes in parenthesis that "Things like this are happening somewhere on the earth every second." It's one of the peculiarities of Agee's writing that he can achieve delicacy and subtlety but never distance. He took everything right on the chin. This doesn't mean that all his material presented itself to him as having equal value, but it did present itself with equal impact. If he'd cared less, he might have been able to shape things more easily. A man who doesn't know which way to turn finds it hard to get his head down. His

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